

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Court Theatre
other names/site number NA

2. Location

street & number 155 Court Square NA ☐ not for publication
city or town Huntingdon NA ☐ vicinity
state Tennessee code TN county Carroll code 017 zip code 38344

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other(explain:) _____	_____	_____

Court Theatre
Name of Property

Carroll County Tennessee
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

0

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art Moderne influence

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK, WOOD

roof ASPHALT, rubber

other GLASS, aluminum

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons Significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations N/A

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/recreation

Period of Significance

1929- 1961

Significant Dates

NA

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Smith, Kennon (contractor)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:

Court Theatre

Court Theatre
Name of Property

Carroll County Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre Huntingdon 9SW

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 371257 3985022
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Angie Bartholomew
organization NA date April 2011
street & number 1045 Concord Road telephone 731-986-8173
city or town Westport state TN zip code 38387

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Jacky and Dixie Atkinson
street & number 1065 Concord Road telephone 731-986-5235
city or town Westport state TN zip code 38387

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Carroll County Tennessee**DESCRIPTION**

The Court Theatre formally opened on the afternoon of October 9, 1929. Located at Huntingdon, Carroll County, Tennessee, it is a significant early movie theater building that began showing movies and stage show performances in 1929. The Court Theatre is located at 155 Court Square, across from the courthouse, in downtown Huntingdon, Tennessee (population 4,349). Private owner Linnie Carter sought to build a state-of-the-art, modern theater, constructed of the finest materials. Although constructed before 1929, the two story brick building is dominated by a circa 1940 marquee. Recent restoration activities have further preserved the theater's integrity and significance. The basic plan of the large open auditorium is intact and maintains the original seating arrangements and stage height.

The building itself was not always a movie house. Originally built for and operated by a feed and farm supply business circa 1896, the structure was converted into a motion picture theater in 1929.¹ The existing floor of the 1896 building was removed and additional concrete piers were added. An extra fifteen feet was added on the north side of the building to accommodate the stage area and a concrete projection booth was added. The south, east, and west brick walls stayed intact. Although it is not known how the late nineteenth – early twentieth century building looked, an expert contractor, Kennon Smith of Bruceton, Tennessee, made a number of substantive changes. The theater was designed in the Art Moderne style and had many features unique for its day. Lighting features were modern for its time, and a real silver screen projection lined the back stage wall. It was equipped with two projector machines. The floor was described as being inclined; having two-ply-half-inch boards placed lengthwise and number one flooring crosswise. A balcony for African American patrons extended about twenty feet over the theater auditorium. The projection booth was engineered of reinforced concrete and steel. All wires were encased in steel conduit.² In 1929 and the years during the 1930s, the theater opened seven days a week and movies changed every few days. The Court Theatre quickly became the main source of entertainment in Huntingdon. Today the Court Theatre opens on weekends beginning with a matinee at four o'clock on Saturday.

The rectangular-shaped theater measures 100 by 42 feet and, at its opening in 1929, could seat approximately 350 patrons. The Court Theatre is a two-story building and rests on a continuous, reinforced concrete foundation. The theater exhibits simple Art Moderne-style detailing on its south facade. The south facade still has its original ticket window and retains its original arrangement.

The hexagon shaped ticket booth at the south façade retains its historic fabric. The booth has the primary glass (pentagon shaped) with black marble top at the base of the glass. Wood paneling covers the earliest wood veneer from the marble top down to the terrazzo floor. Situated between

¹ Warranty Deed filed for Rec. - Lewis F. Johnson, August 14, 1919, Page 146.

² *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, October 2, 1929, Carroll County Library Archives.

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the recessed front entrances is the original steel poster display case. Two sets of wood frame glass windowed double doors now replace the earlier solid wood doors. The entire south facade entrance sits among colors of gray, black, and gold original terrazzo flooring (3 ft. width). The terrazzo floor in 1929 extended out to the street but, in 1975, the City of Huntingdon replaced all existing court square sidewalk materials with decorative imitation brick. The south front entrances have another four fenestrations. A single door beside the ticket booth leads to the southwest side of the mezzanine. A modern windowed door replaces the original southwest entrance door. The original stairs, built in 1929, lead to the mezzanine. This entrance was for the black movie patrons of the community.

The south facade stairwell to the balcony has the original pine wood flooring of 1929. On the southeast front side, two modern windows and a new windowed single door replace the older ones. The columns on the front extend from the sidewalk level to above the marquee, and join the mezzanine level. Although the exterior wall material on the lower portion of the south facade is partially covered with wood materials, and the front doors have been replaced with wood framed modern glass double doors, the theater's basic configuration remain intact.

The Court Theatre building still reflects the design and sensation of an early to mid- twentieth-century movie theater. For the first three decades of its existence as a theater, the first story façade below the marquee was covered in wood. At some point in time (probably in the 1960s), the wood was covered in red brick. When the building was being restored in 2010, all materials were removed down to the original framing and re-covered with ½-inch exterior wood and ¾-inch wood trim. Electrical wiring was updated at this time.

The Court Theatre retains its innovative marquee, which forms a one-story porch above the building's recessed central entrance. It is constructed of heavy reinforced steel and metal. The marquee has three exposed sides. The side elevations provide space for movie titles and show times, and the name "COURT" centers the side attraction panels. In 1940, Linnie Carter sold the theater to Rockwood Amusement Incorporated. In August of that year, Rockwood completely remodeled the theater. Huntingdon's *Tennessee Republican* newspaper reported on the progress of the theater remodeling in 1940. The Court Theatre would only be closed for a few days while the interior was refurbished including restrooms, theater seating, heating, and lighting. Reports varied as to whether the exterior of the building had "a new Marquee that would add much to the appearance of the north side of the square" or a refurbished "brilliantly lighted marquee."³ Today, the marquee reflects the 1940s style. The southeast panel has its original porcelain enamel panel, but the southwest panel was so broken up and discolored that a new PVC panel now replaces the damaged one. Surrounding the attraction panels, lighting sockets and trim are covered with maroon and gold metal. In 1940, the marquee had many lights around the underside edge, as well as rows of lights. The name "COURT" and the attraction panels illuminated the marquee with neon and bulb lights. However, the lights on the marquee have been dim for many years. Upon the

³ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, September 6, 1940, Carroll County Library Archives.

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completion of additional restoration work in coming years, neon lights will illuminate the marquee and restoration will give the theater porch its appearance of 1940.⁴

Underneath the marquee, at the main entrance to the theater, four feet of grey, black, and red terrazzo cover the floor. Three-inch strips of yellow cornices are set in the perimeter of Art Deco details. In time, the brilliance of lights will envelop the marquee. The floor lies over concrete and the design extends into the main lobby of the theater. With its basic base design undamaged, the building's street level facade still reflects its earliest design.

The south facade exterior wall above the marquee is its earliest red brick. The newly painted original metal nine-over-one double-hung windows are the same as they were when Linnie Carter bought the building in 1923. The tripled windows flank the center portion of the second story where painted wood panels cover the center fenestrations. When the building was constructed to provide accommodation for movies in 1929, a concrete room was designed for the projection booth on the interior backside of the center glass windows. Boards were nailed over the window openings, at that time. One can assume that the windows were removed because there was not any glass found when repairing the area. In 2010 during restoration, contractor Don Bartholomew saw that the panels had deteriorated to the point of needing replacement. Wood window framing and panels were fabricated to resemble the openings of the east and west side metal windows.

The brick above the windows is a common stretcher bond – courses of five, six, and seven stretcher bond bricks interspersed with single and double-header courses, and two separate courses of vertical rowlock bricks in a horizontal line with square stones across the width of the front. The south front roofline features a multi-level, tile-capped parapet. The parapet is three feet tall and twelve inches thick. The east and west roofline is a stepped parapet style, sloping to the north side. The windows, brick wall, and parapet above the marquee have not been changed from its original structure. The wood panels and window trim were painted to beautify the south facade while refurbishing the building in 2010.

The north (rear) elevation is a red brick wall laid in stretcher bond brick. At the first story level there is a modern door leading to the basement level and on the east and west corners are air and heat units. On the east and west corners of the second level are fire exit doors from the building. The east side fenestration has its original door and the old stairs remain. This door is used to exit the north side of the building in the case of a fire. Above the door is an air-conditioning shell with a wooden platform. This second level northeast side door is not being used at this date, but leads to a storage room that earlier housed a huge cooling fan and in 1940, an air-conditioning system. A door leading into the basement is used for a storage area.

⁴ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, August 23, 1940, Carroll County Library Archives.

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Many of the interior features of the Court Theatre are original to the 1929 building and the remodeled theater in 1940. The main lobby's carpeted floor that was placed down in 1940 has been removed, revealing the terrazzo tile, which has been polished to its original beauty.

The main outside entrance leads to the theater's central lobby where grey, black, and red speckled terrazzo flooring with intersecting triangular designs carry the colors and designs from the exterior leading to the lobby. Along the west wall of the interior entrance is the original ticket booth and the first concrete money vault. Above the vault are the earlier wooden shelves. The money safe and ticket booth are intact and were unchanged during restoration. Originally the restrooms, office, and the concession stand were on the west wall. The office is now a storage supply room. It is equipped with a sink and shelves, and it houses the electrical circuit breaker box. The lower wall of the storage room is original concrete plaster with only a coat of paint. The remainder of the west wall houses a new concession stand that replaced the original bathrooms. The original boy's restroom was untouched and is now equipped with the water heater.

The east wall of the lobby was the concession stand and storage, in 1929. The stand has been replaced with modern bathrooms with the original Boys/Girls signs hanging on the doors. During the remodeling in 1940, a powder room was also added.⁵ The walls are covered in paint called "gold digger" and off white wood baseboard trim envelope the lobby. An original 1929 light fixture hangs from the center of the ceiling, and the original exit light casings with stained glass insets that spell out "EXIT" are centered over the entrance doors.

The foyer of the theater is its original dimensions, openings, walls, and sub floor. There are the original three-fourths inch yellow pine tongue and groove wood stairwell leading up to the balcony and the original utility closet on the east side. The openings leading to the auditorium are the original openings. There are five wooden theater chairs from the 1930s sitting in the theater hall below two movie poster displays for coming attractions. New carpet has been laid, and leads into the theater auditorium.

The Court Theatre's auditorium has not lost its authenticity and the ambience of when it was first built. The top three-fourths of the sidewalls were covered in soundproof board called "celotex" which was removed during the 2010 restoration to reveal the original red brick walls of the building of 1923. The brick is now partially covered with floral design drape panels. Still visible, between the drapes, are the voids left in the brick, remnant of scaffolding or shelving removed during the 1929 rebuilding of the theater. The walls below the brick have their original concrete plaster with newly wood trimmed edges, painted in dark brown. The columns are now encased in decorative wood trim and have Art Deco-style light fixtures.

The main floor of the theater slopes down to the stage, accommodating two aisles between a center section of seating and seating on each. The two newly carpeted aisles extend the length of

⁵ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, August 23, 1940, Carroll County Library Archives.

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the auditorium toward the screen. The inclined floor affords a clear view from any part of the auditorium. The flooring has its original three-fourths yellow pine tongue and groove.

A few broken boards were replaced during restoration and with a little sanding and paint, the floor is now back to its former condition. On each side of the movie screen are single doors. The east door is a fire exit door. Both doors lead to the original back stage waiting area for stage performances. The original stage and screen equipment are still intact, but a newer screen was attached in front of the stage sometime during the 1960s. This movie screen is still being used to project today's movies. A new tiled ceiling covers the existing one and 220 new cushioned modern movie chairs have been added. The balcony cantilevers out over the main auditorium, with wood structure and a curved facade wrapped in smooth stucco finish and one-inch thick cement plaster. This is all authentic to the 1929 theater.

Presently, the stage is a work in progress. In the beginning of the "Court Theatre," the movie screen was on the back wall of the stage. Curtains hung closed and were opened for stage performances and movies. At some point in time (1960s), the curtains were replaced with the existing movie screen. In the future, the stage will be restored, with vintage looking curtains hanging above the stage. The fifty-year-old movie screen that is now used will be replaced with a roll down screen at the back of the stage.

At the time the Court Theatre opened in October of 1929, the balcony could seat 100 patrons. Today, the two stairwells leading up to the balcony are the original yellow pine wood floor and the balcony floor is its original three-fourths yellow pine tongue and groove. The wood and metal theater seats have been removed and stored in the basement. Many of them have an unattractive appearance, but five were refinished and placed in the foyer. The balcony is empty today, but plans are to paint the original floor and add new theater seats.

The projection booth room is centered on the south wall of the balcony. It is made of reinforced concrete and steel. The booth had two projectors until the 1960s. Only one 1940 projector runs movies today. Updated electrical wiring and a new surround sound system have been installed.

The balcony and the projector room are also a work in progress. Eventually the balcony will re-open to the public. (See figures 1 and 2.)

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Court Theatre, established in 1929, is being nominated to the National Register for its local significance under Criterion A in the area of recreation and entertainment. Established by Linnie Carter as an independent movie theater, it operated from 1929 to 1940 under her ownership and management.⁶ The theater was sold to Rockwood Amusement Company in 1940.⁷ In 1951, Kermit Stengel of Nashville, TN, transferred the theater from Rockwood Amusement, Inc., to Rockwood Theatres, Incorporated.⁸ The theater continued to operate under Rockwood Theatres until 1986. Carl and Letha Holland owned and operated the theater in 1986 and then sold it to Rayburn and Brenda O'Brien in 1987. It was bought from the O'Briens in 1995 by Leslie Curtis. From 2010 to present day, the theater has been owned and operated by Jacky and Dixie Atkinson of Westport, Tennessee.⁹ The Court Theatre was and still is the only movie theater in Huntingdon, TN. The physical appearance of the Court Theatre building remains almost the same as it has for the last eighty years. The restoration in 2010 retained most of its historic materials and reestablished its important role as a center of popular entertainment in the community.

The Court Theatre at Huntingdon, Carroll County, Tennessee, is a significant early movie theater that was established by a female entrepreneur, Linnie McCracken Carter. In the late 1800s, Carter attended Mrs. M.E. Clark's Select School for Women in Nashville, graduated from Cumberland Female College in McMinnville, TN, and attended Gregg Business College. Linnie McCracken married Luther Carter of Huntingdon, Tennessee, on October 1, 1900. When Carter's husband died in 1910, she became superintendent of Oak Hill Cemetery in Huntingdon. She was overseer of the beautification and preservation of the cemetery and supervised all necessary activities, both physical and financial, of the Oak Hill throughout the rest of her life. Carter expanded her entrepreneurial activities when she opened Huntingdon's first motion picture theater in the Olive Hotel sometime between 1915 and 1919.¹⁰ She then moved her theater to the circuit court room of the old courthouse on August 4, 1919. On October 16, 1923, she bought a building serving as a feed and farm supply business from Lewis Johnson and renovated it into the present Court Theatre on the north side of the Court Square in the summer of 1929. This was the same lot where her grandfather built his four-room log house years before. In August 1929, the local paper noted, "The brick work had started on the Court Theatre building, on the north side of the square. A good deal of the reinforced concrete foundation was completed."¹¹

The Court Theatre opened its doors to the public on Wednesday, October 9, 1929, at two o'clock, which coincided with the first day of the Carroll County Fair. *The Viking*, the first all-Technicolor

⁶ Warranty Deed Filed for Rec. Linnie McCracken Carter, October 16, 1923, 156.

⁷ Warranty Deed Filed for Rec. Rockwood Amusement, Inc., May 1, 1940, 53.

⁸ Warranty Deed filed for Rec. Rockwood Theatres, Inc., November 3, 1951, Deed Book 77, 53.

⁹ Warranty Deed Filed for Rec. Jacky and Dixie Atkinson, June 24, 2010, DB 349, 51.

¹⁰ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, June 9, 1961, Carroll County Archives. Roselyn Espey, personal interview, 125 West Paris Street, Huntingdon, TN., June 24, 2010.

¹¹ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, August 16, 1929, Carroll County Archives.

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movie with synchronized sound effects and score (but no talking) film produced, and an *Our Gang* comedy were the opening-day features. Huntingdon's mayor presented Linnie Carter with flowers as an appreciation of her opening the theater in the community.¹²

In May 1940, Carter sold the theater to Rockwood Amusement. Attention was given to the Court Theatre Grand Premier in the *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, on August 23, 1940.

Huntingdon will soon have a completely remodeled theater. It will be one of the most modern in West Tennessee. Cushioned seats will replace the old hard seats, more seating capacity, two cooling systems, fine heating plant, ladies powder room, and many other improvements, not to mention a new marquee that will add much to the appearance of the north side of the square. The Court Theatre will only close following the last night performance of the *Grand Ole Opry*, for five days, while workmen put finishing touches to the remodeling that will give Huntingdon a theater of beauty and convenience.¹³

The first movie shown after restoration was *All This and Heaven Too* on August 30, 1940.

The newspaper reported shortly after that the restored theater was a hit with the people of Huntingdon. "Large crowds attend first shows in Carroll County's newest theater. Huntingdon's newly remodeled Court Theatre was opened to the public as hundreds of theatergoers poured into its doors. Completely remodeled from the brilliantly lighted marquee at the front, to the rear walls, the theater now gives this community one of the best theatres in the state, and rates the slogan of 'Showplace of West Tennessee.'"¹⁴

Under the ownership of both Carter and Rockwood Amusement, the Court Theatre not only presented a continuous stream of Hollywood films, it also served as an important venue for community events. Movies were run on a regular basis with four shows each day and two shows each night.¹⁵ Through the early years of the Court Theatre, it also hosted popular live stage shows. For example, famous songwriter Buddy Kaye played at the Court on February 16, 1940, before the theater was completely remodeled. Roy Acuff played in August and October of 1940. Special events featuring local talent such as stage shows, beauty pageants, events helping the needy, and matinees for the children were held at the theater as well. "Court Installs Talkie: Opening 'Talkie' Performance at Local Court Theatre Was a Splendid Success" was the headline in a 1939 news article.¹⁶ In December of 1940, a free movie was shown for the needy children. The owner of the theater also worked with the Lions Club to present a movie to help the organization generate holiday donations for needy families by offering admission in exchange for

¹² *The Viking* poster, 1928 movie, <http://www.moviepostershop.com/the-viking> posters, accessed December 12, 2010; *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, October 9 and 16, 1929, Carroll County Archives.

¹³ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, August 23, 1940, Carroll County Archives.

¹⁴ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, September 6, 1940, Carroll County Archives.

¹⁵ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, February, August, and October, 1940, Carroll County Archives.

¹⁶ 1939 news article. In possession of author.

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“...a toy, a can of fruit, and a bag of candy.”¹⁷ Other organizations also utilized the theater’s stage. The Future Farmers of America and 4H’ers of the county, for example, used the stage of the theater for their annual competitions. During the 1940s and 1950s, many additional community events such as amateur night, singing groups, local stage shows, and band and musical talent were held on stage and followed by a picture show.

From the 1920s through the 1950s, the Carroll County Fair was held on the Huntingdon’s Court Square. Fair Week was the time of the year when thousands of people came to the Huntingdon Court Square to join in the activities of the week. It was recorded in the Carroll County Courthouse book, that eight to ten thousand people attended the Carroll County Fair, on Huntingdon’s Court Square in the early 1900s. All through the period of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the Court Theatre hosted many events for the Carroll County Fair, such as 4-H competitions, beauty contests, and live music.¹⁸

The theater is a part of the town’s history, and holds a significant value to many individuals in the Huntingdon area. Interviews with former employees of the theater provide additional evidence of its role as a popular entertainment and recreational center of the community, as well as a valued workplace. For example, Max Walker worked in the concession stand throughout the 1940s and can still recall how popular the theater’s shows were during that period. In a recent interview, Mr. Walker stated that, “on Saturday, the court square was so crowded with people, it looked like ants.”¹⁹ He also talked about taking the popcorn popper outside to sell popcorn to the public. Popcorn sold for 10 cents a bag. Mr. Walker said, “One Saturday (he doesn’t remember a specific Saturday), I sold one hundred twenty dollars worth of popcorn. Approximately 1,200 people bought popcorn that Saturday at the Huntingdon Court Theatre.”²⁰

The Court Theatre’s community events also launched the careers of emerging talents from the area. Circa 1938, Brooksie Orr sang with a group called the Clarksburg Canaries on the Court Theatre’s stage. The Clarksburg Canaries won the talent show that was held during Fair in the Court Theatre and were invited to sing on the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Danny Dill, a songwriter, also started his career on the stage of the Court Theatre and began a successful profession in the music industry.²¹

Members of the African-American community within Huntingdon also enjoyed the Court Theatre’s shows throughout the years, although they were forced to use separate entrances, seating areas, and facilities, as was typical in the mid-twentieth century American South. J.T. Williamson worked at the theater taking up tickets for the black patrons who were required to sit in the balcony. Mr.

¹⁷ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, December 4, 1940, Carroll County Archives.

¹⁸ Carroll County (sesquicentennial booklet/Mary Ruth Devault, chairman of booklet committee). McKenzie TN: *McKenzie Banner* for Carroll County Historical Society.

¹⁹ Personal Interview with Max Walker, Huntingdon, TN, October 5, 2010.

²⁰ Personal Interview with Max Walker, Huntingdon, TN, October 5, 2010.

²¹ Brooksie Orr, personal interviews, various dates.

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Williamson, now 83, took up tickets from the black movie patrons, and recalled that blacks entered the theater through a separate door from the whites and could only sit in the balcony. Bathroom facilities for his race were outside in the alley. There were bathroom facilities inside only for the whites. Not only did Williamson take up tickets at the theater, but cleaned it as well. He also changed the movie titles on the marquee.²²

The Court Theatre remains almost the same as it has for the last eighty years and retains integrity of location and setting. The theater holds a special place in the hearts of Huntingdon residents because many of them grew up watching movies there and now take their children and grandchildren to the Court.

Altogether, Linnie McCracken Carter built an entertainment business in Huntingdon, Tennessee with great foresight. An editorial in the *Tennessee Republican Newspaper*, on Friday, June 9, 1961 stated, "Some folks live a lifetime in a town, and never leave a mark to be remembered by. Some of us straddle the fence on almost every issue, afraid to make a stand for what we think is right, afraid to stand up for our principle, taking the easiest way out. So when we have a citizen of our town who always "faces the music" and takes a firm stand on every issue, we admire her very much. That is why the folks of Huntingdon, admire, love, and respect Miss Linnie. Miss Linnie never retreats from life. She faces up and always has."²³

The Huntingdon Court Theatre has been in continuous operation for over eighty years, with the exception of closing its doors to moviegoers for the duration of the months during July- December 2010, for restoration. Throughout the years of the Court Theatre's business, many changes have taken place in our communities and cities. Bigger and more expensive multi-plex cinemas have slowly replaced the once single screen local cinemas. While gaining a bigger variety of movies to choose from at one time, the ability to enjoy a movie with friends and neighbors in a small community theater such as the Court is now both an exceptional experience and a welcome change.

As Lynn Smith wrote in a recent note to the current owners, Linnie Carter's original vision of the theater as a special venue for the community lives on. "Thank you for opening up the theater to the seniors in our community last month. The renovations of the theater are most welcomed, yet it is amazing that still there is the essence of days gone by. The Court Theatre may be up to the modern times of its viewing pleasure, but the history within its walls will last many life times."²⁴

²² *Carroll County News-Leader*, January 19, 2011.

²³ *Tennessee Republican Newspaper* editorial note, June 19, 1961, Carroll County Archives.

²⁴ Lynn Smith, Administrator of Harmony Hill Assisted Living, Thank-you note, Huntingdon, TN, March 16, 2011.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property is parcel 073K I 006.00. This includes all the property associated with the Court Theatre. (See Figure 3.)

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photos by: Angie Bartholomew
Date: August 2010 – April 2011
Digital Image: Tennessee Historical Commission

1. New south facade, street level, facing north
2. New south facade, top of Court House steps, facing north
3. New east elevation, facing west
4. New east elevation, facing west
5. New west elevation, facing east (complete image did not print)
6. New west elevation, facing east
7. North facade, facing south
8. West elevation, facing east
9. East elevation, facing west
10. New main lobby concession stand, east facade, facing west
11. New main lobby concession stand, foyer, facing northeast
12. New remodeled main lobby & foyer, facing northeast
13. Main lobby terrazzo floor, facing east
14. Main lobby 1929 light fixture, facing southeast
15. Main lobby, 1929 exit sign, (one over the east door, not pictured), 1929 light, facing southeast
16. Remodeled interior foyer and restored wood and metal seats, facing northeast
17. Remodeled interior lobby entrance, facing southeast
18. Remodeled main theater, balcony view, facing north
19. Remodeled interior of main theatre, west facade, facing southwest
20. Remodeled interior of main theatre, east facade, facing southeast
21. Remodeled interior of main theatre, hardwood plank floor, facing west
22. Remodeled interior of main theatre balcony, facing south
23. View of partially renovated Court Theatre facade at movie time, on courthouse steps, facing north
24. View of partially renovated ticket booth & terrazzo tile at movie time, facing west
25. Photo from 1946 of Court Theatre, facing southeast, photographer unknown
26. Photo from 1946 of Court Theatre, facing southeast, photographer unknown
27. Photo from 1884 of Court Theatre facade, facing north, photographer unknown
28. Ticket booth, marquee, exterior second level, facing northwest
29. COURT letters, exterior projector room wall and exterior balcony wall facade, facing north
30. South facade, showing uncovered ticket booth, original COURT letters and marquee facade, facing north
31. Earlier concession stand facade, facing west

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32. Earlier interior foyer facade, facing north
33. Earlier interior foyer, facing northeast
34. The past girls/boys restrooms, facing northwest
35. The past girls/boys restroom facade, facing east
36. The past and previous boys' restroom sign facade, facing east
37. The past and previous girls restroom sign facade, facing east
38. Photo of the 1940 projector, still running movie film, facing west
39. Photo of past and previous turntable, facing east
40. View of historic wood and metal balcony seats, facing west
41. Intact balcony wood floor, facing east
42. West side of the projector room, original windows and brick walls, facing south
43. Previous main theatre auditorium, seats, foyer entrance from auditorium, balcony banister, facing south
44. Renovation period, main auditorium and balcony banister, facing south
45. Renovation period, main auditorium, facing north
46. Renovation period, east side of movie screen, facing northeast
47. Stage floor, facing east
48. Stage east room, facing northeast

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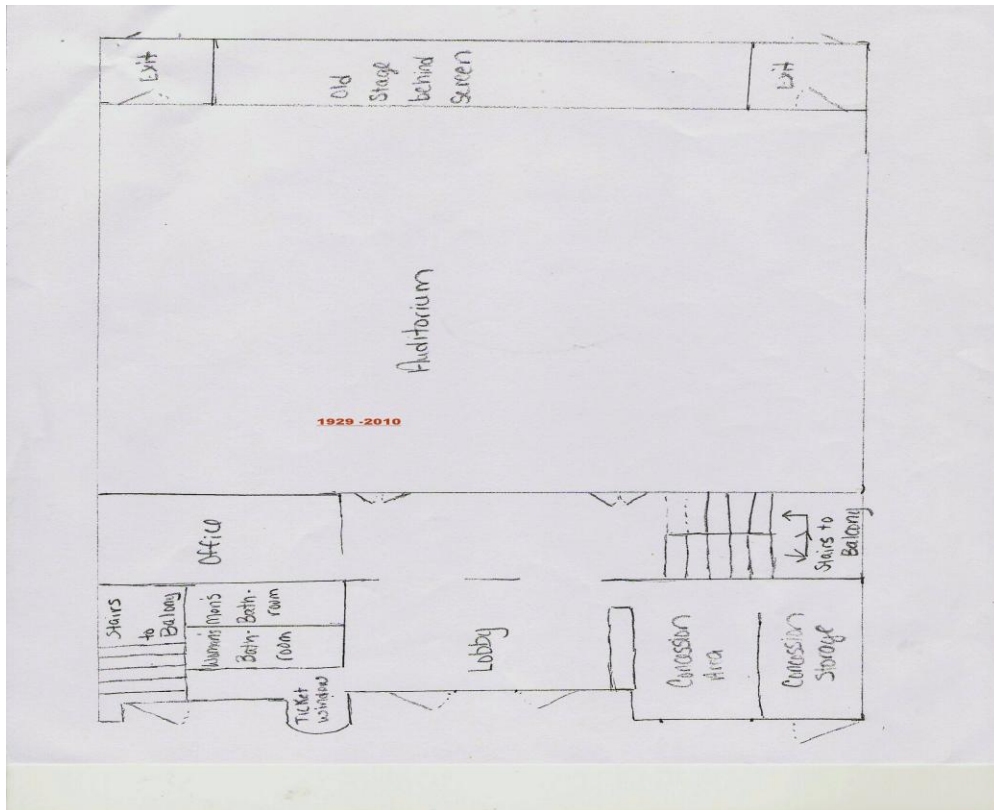


Figure 1. August 1929 - August 2010. First floor

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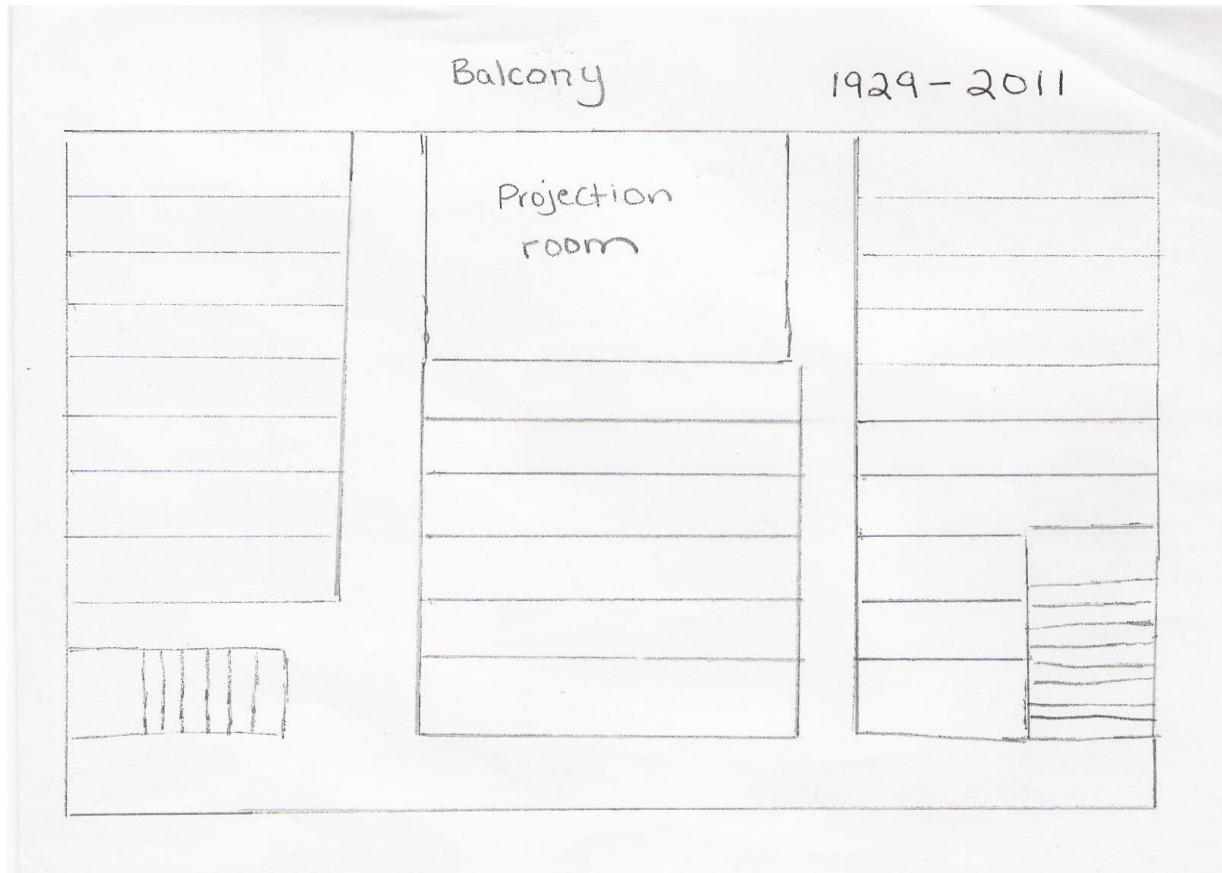


Figure 2. Second floor

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44'

Figure 3. Tax map

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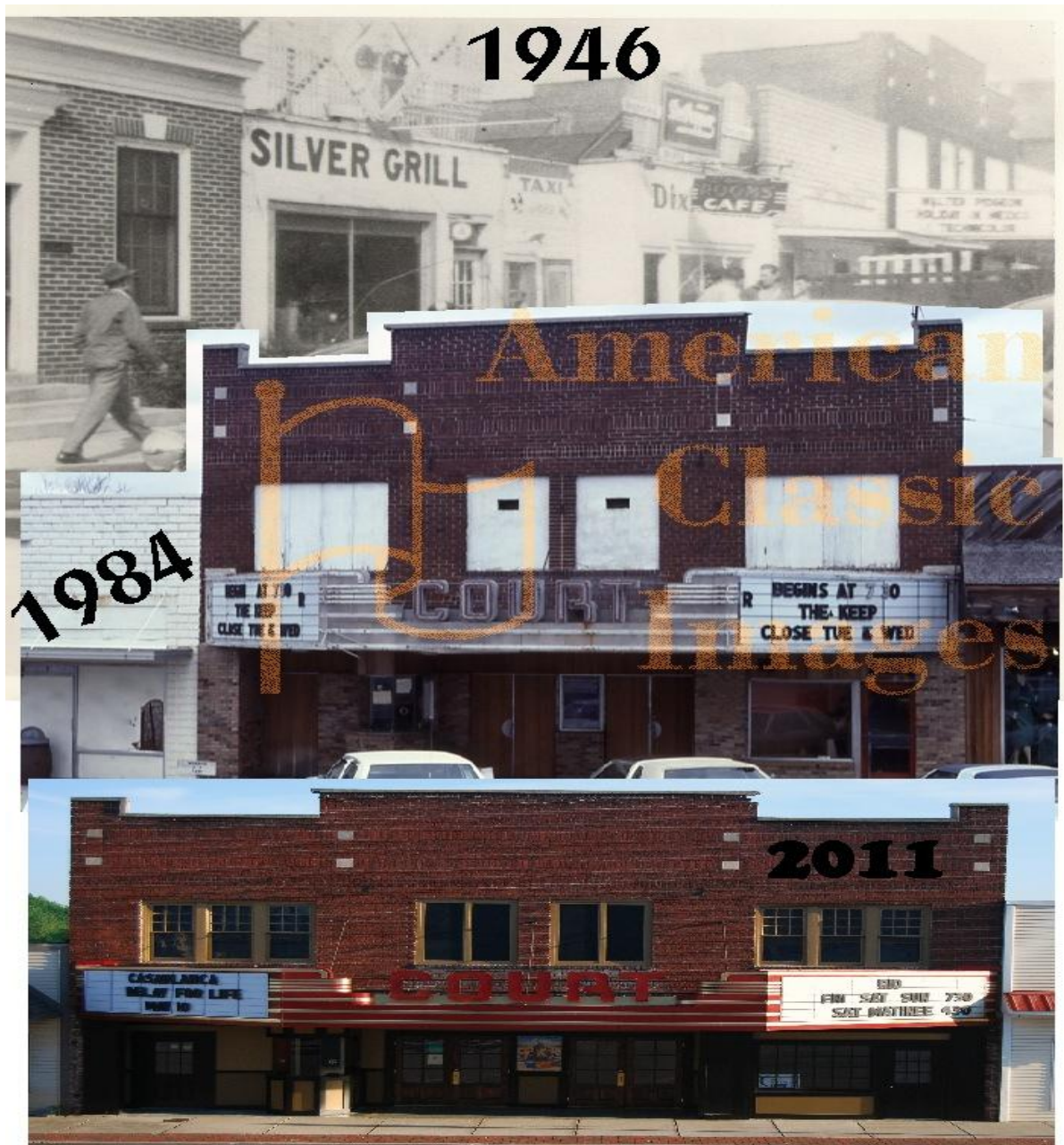


Figure 4. Facade of the theater over the years.